

Can He Accept This Gift

by Russetwolf1618

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Summary: Angel/BtVS - Kate learns about Buffy, and Angel and Buffy must make a choice

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Title: Can He Accept This Gift (1/1) Author: Marty

mgorcos@hotmail.com Disclaimer: None of the characters or quotes borrowed from the shows are mine. They all belong to Joss, otherwise known as the Evil God who controls our obsession, and his company of devilish angels. The WB and Fox are in there somewhere too. I just want to take their toys out for a spin for a little while. I'll return them unharmed. Distribution: Do not archive without permission from the author Spoilers : Season 1 up to The Prodigal for Angel and Season 4, Pangs for Buffy. Summary: Kate learns about Angel and Buffy, and Angel and Buffy are given a choice. Author's Notes: Yes, it's another "Get Angel and Buffy back together somehow" fic.

Hopefully original enough to hold your interest. No Kate bashing involved, I happen to like her, but she needs to cut Angel some slack. Riley and Buffy never got together, cuz I don't want him to get his feelings hurt by Buffy's choice here. Feedback: Please, oh please. I crave it like Spike craves a good blood-letting.

'Angel Investigations.' Kate stared at the small brass plate affixed to the door.

Why couldn't she just forget Angel's existence? Ever since finding out about his alternate identity, she had wavered between morbid fascination and utter horror at what he was. She no longer doubted he was one of the good guys, but the fact that he was once a monster couldn't be washed away, either.

She sighed, dismissing her bleak thoughts, and pushed open the door.

"Welcome to Angel Investigations! We help the...oh. Hi, Kate." Cordelia's bright, enthusiastic customer voice dropped to a normal

tone when she saw that it wasn't a potential customer on the doorstep.

"Hello, Cordelia. Is Angel in?"

"Yes, Brood boy is in his office, reading up on...thing type creatures." Cordelia waved her hand toward Angel's door, not even looking up from her magazine.

Kate smiled a little at the sight of Cordelia, feet up on her desk, Vogue magazine spread on her lap. She looked like the stereotypical decorative secretary, yet Kate knew that she was a full partner in Angel's investigative team. She was one of the few people Kate felt she had misread. Normally, she was very good at sizing people up, but Cordelia Chase was someone whose outer shell hid a surprisingly deep center.

Knocking at Angel's door, she swung it open in response to his absent-minded "Come in." Angel was sitting at his desk, uncannily mirroring Cordelia's posture. Black shod feet, crossed at the ankle, rested on the edge of his desk. Soft black trousers topped with a charcoal grey raw silk sweater clung to his muscular body. An illustrated book, open to a particularly nasty variety of demon was open on his lap, and a gleaming sword lay, unsheathed, across his desktop.

"Hi, am I disturbing you?" Kate asked, coming forward and sitting down in the chair opposite him.

Angel glanced up, then quirked his lips in a welcoming half-smile as he shut the book and swung his legs to the floor. "No, just doing some research. What can I do for you, Kate?"

Kate got up and began pacing around the room. "I just...um, I..." she stumbled to a halt, for once at a loss for words. How do you go about asking a vampire to bare his soul and answer questions about himself and his nature?

Angel watched Kate. He knew what she was here for, he had been expecting her for days. Eventually, the shock of learning what he was would be replaced by a need to know who he was. He had seen it before, which was part of the reason he tended to keep to himself. He wasn't good at the sharing, but Kate deserved some answers.

"You want to ask me some questions." It was a statement, not a question, and Kate sighed in relief that he had broached the subject.

"Well, yes...if you don't mind." Kate glanced down quickly, then forced herself to look at him. He was so handsome, truly he did have the face of an angel. It had made the...change...that happened to his face that much more repellent to her when she had seen it for the first time. He had been very careful not to let it happen again, she had noticed, perhaps sensing her horror.

Angel sighed, getting up to look out at the deepening twilight. "Let's go upstairs to the roof, it'll be more private, and I enjoy the view this time of day."

"Okay," Kate agreed, and they headed out of the office toward the

elevator.

"Cordelia, we're going upstairs..." Angel began, only to stop as the phone rang and Cordelia picked it up.

"Hang on, I should probably stay and see if I need to take this," Angel told Kate, and she nodded in understanding.

"Yes, okay. Are you sure?" Cordelia looked at Angel in concern, and he stiffened. Cordelia never looked concerned. Exasperated, terrified, yes. Concerned looks implied something that would affect him personally, and the only thing he could think of was...Buffy.

"Alright, I'll tell him." Cordelia set the phone in its cradle very slowly, refusing to look at Angel. Kate watched the byplay between them in fascination. She had heard nothing in the phone call to worry them, yet Angel was staring at Cordelia with a half-terrified, half-yearning look in his eyes, and Cordelia was looking everywhere but at her boss.

Finally, she looked up at him, and the compassionate look she gave Angel caused him to pale noticeably. "What is it, Cordelia?"

"Angel, that was Giles. Buffy..." Cordelia stopped, and dropped her head in her hands. "Why is it always me that has to deal with this stuff. I'm going to need a day off tomorrow!" she wailed, and Angel slammed his hands down on her desk.

"What about Buffy, Cordelia? She's not...no, she can't be. I would have sensed it..." Angel's voice actually caught in his throat, and Kate watched in disbelief as he stumbled to a halt. She had never seen Angel lose his composure this way. Who was this Buffy?

"No, she's fine. Well, as fine as can be expected. Apparently, she had her own little run-in with a Mohra demon, out to avenge the one you took care of at Thanksgiving." Cordelia paused, and continued with a rush of words, "And the wackiest thing happened! You know the whole 'regenerate things with the blood' deal it has? Well, it regenerated Buffy's...memories." She nodded significantly at him, and he dropped into a chair with a groan.

"She's coming here, isn't she?"

"No...she's already arrived, Angel." The quiet voice came from near the front door, and all three of them swiveled to see...Buffy.

Kate stared at the young girl standing in the doorway. She was tiny, no more than an inch or two over five feet tall, and maybe weighed a hundred pounds if you added in her clothes and shoes. Her long, silvery blond hair was caught in a clasp at the back of her head, and her eyes...her eyes were filled with the same brooding anguish that Kate sometimes saw in Angel's face.

Angel stood and faced her. He was stiff, as if holding himself ready for a blow. "Hello, Buffy," he said in a quiet, aching voice that

Kate had never heard him use. She noticed that Cordelia was swiftly gathering her things together, and she stepped over to catch her arm.

"What's going on?" Kate questioned, nodding to where Angel and Buffy were just frozen, staring at each other.

Cordelia put a finger to her lips and grabbed her arm, leading her toward the door. "Kate and I are going to get some coffee, we'll be back in about an hour. Bye, Buffy!"

Kate smiled at the teenage girl as she was yanked past her out the door. She got a tiny nod in return, but Buffy never once took her attention away from Angel.

Cordelia settled into a chair at the table, setting down her latte. Kate was waved into a seat next to her, and the two women sat for a moment, sipping their coffee in silence.

"What just went on back there?" Kate asked finally.

"How much has Angel told you about himself?" Cordelia countered, flipping her hair back.

"Not much. We were just going to...when you whisked me out of there. All I really know is what the references say about Angelus. I still have no idea why or how he became...good?...and how he came to be here in Los Angeles, doing what he does." Kate sipped nervously at her coffee, and waited for Cordelia to spill what she knew. If there was one thing she had learned about Angel's friend, it was that she gave out the unvarnished truth to anyone who asked.

"Okay, here's the deal in a nutshell. Angelus messed with a girl he shouldn't have, a gypsy. Her tribe cursed him by returning his soul." Cordelia paused and inquired archly, "You do know that vampires don't have their human souls, right? When the person is killed, the soul goes to wherever it is souls go, and a demon moves into the vacated housing, only retaining the human's memories and some personality traits.."

Kate snorted a little, amused by Cordelia's colorful phrasing. "Yes, I knew that. So why was the return of his soul a curse?...oh. Tell me he didn't retain...but of course, he would have had to. He has to live with the memories?"

Cordelia nodded, face twisted in a grimace. "And we both know just how nasty Angel's demon was during his tenancy." They sighed in unison, before Cordelia continued. "So, for the last hundred years or so, Angel has been on a monstrous guilt-trip about what the demon did."

"And that's why he helps people now..." Kate finished, and Cordelia smiled sadly. Kate finished her coffee in silence, then asked the question that was burning inside of her. "So, how does he eat?"

"Blood bank, and the butcher," Cordelia responded succinctly, before getting up to refill their cups. Sitting back down, she continued,

"Blood bank is a last resort, though. Angel says it's easier to control his hunger if he avoids human blood as much as possible. He hasn't drunk from a real human since..." Cordelia trailed off, then finished quietly, "Buffy, last summer."

"Buffy? The girl in his office? And she's still alive? And comes to see him?" Kate knew she was shooting questions at Cordelia faster than she could answer them, but she couldn't help it. Cordelia had just blown all her pre-conceived notions out of the water.

"Oh, now that's a longer story than we have time for, unless..." Cordelia pulled out her cell-phone and dialed the office. The phone at the other end rang and rang, but no one picked up. Finally, she gave up and dropped it back in her purse. "Okay, it seems we have time. Shall we get some dinner, and I'll fill you in?"

"Why, Angel?"

"One of us had to remember, to prevent the events from repeating. I thought that it would be easier for both of us if it was me..."

Buffy slumped, tears welling in her eyes. She knew now they had covered this territory before, but she needed to hear it again. "Why would you take something so precious away from me? Didn't you know how much the memory of us together would mean to me, especially after how our last time ended?"

"I wanted you to be able to move on, and I just thought it would be harder for both of us if we had this between us." Angel reached forward and gently gathered her sobbing body into his arms, ruthlessly suppressing the immediate surge of desire that sang along his nerve endings at the feel of her.

"Angel...can't the Oracles remove the clause in your curse? If they can turn back the clock..." Buffy looked up at him hopefully, clinging to him, determined not to lose him again.

"You know the curse isn't the only reason I left, Buffy," Angel replied sadly. "I wanted to give you an opportunity to have a normal life with a man who could give you everything I can't. Children, sunshine, a respite from the darkness of your life..."

"My doctor told me I can't have children," Buffy revealed quietly. Her mother had been heartbroken when Buffy had told her, but Buffy was relieved. Her greatest fear was the loss of her loved ones, and she had never planned to bring a child into her world. Neither Angel nor Joyce had believed her, but now both would have to accept the reality. "Giles thinks it is a side-effect of being the Slayer, my doctor just says my eggs never matured. Either way, children are not part of my future."

Angel hugged her tightly. He was surprised at the loss he felt. It was as if an impossible hope he had been secretly holding in his heart, Buffy cuddling his child, had curled up and blown away. "I'm sorry, Buffy."

"I'm not." Buffy saw Angel look at her doubtfully. "I'm not! I never

planned to have children, that's a dream you and mom had for me, not one I had for myself."

Angel sighed but nodded, admitting to himself for the first time that his wish for Buffy to have children stemmed from his desire to have a part of her live on after her inevitable death. He had been selfish, even if it was unconscious. He hadn't wanted to live on in a world without a part of Buffy still in it. His fear, his needs, not hers.

Now, he had to face the fact that he had left not for her, but for himself. He had lied to himself, and lied to her. "I'm so sorry, Buffy."

And Buffy knew that this time, Angel was apologizing for the decisions he had made for both of them.

In the background, the phone rang, unheard by the two people holding each other. Light faded, leaving them to merge with the darkness of the shadowy office.

"You've been doing the whole research trip with the demony things, haven't you?" Cordelia asked as they began eating their dinner.

"Yes, especially after that incident in the subway, I figured I'd better have a crash course in the subject." Kate grimaced as she remembered her recent behavior. "I tried burying my head in the sand, and the only thing that got me was the loss of my father."

"Hey, I'm sorry about that. Angel said he begged your father to invite him in. Let me tell you, brooding reached new heights after he couldn't save him." Cordelia smiled sympathetically at Kate.

"So, are you going to tell me about Buffy?" Kate asked, curious about the girl who had made Angel so...uneasy? Was that the word for the tension she had felt coming from him?

"I'm getting there," Cordelia said. "Did your books ever mention someone called The Slayer?"

"The Slayer..." Kate sat and thought for a little while, then shook her head. "No, it sounds familiar, but I think that's because the chronicles about Angelus just mentioned he used to make a habit of killing them."

"Okay, here's the sitch on The Slayer." Cordelia paused to swallow the last bite of her salad before continuing. "The Slayer is a girl who has the strength and speed and stuff to fight vampires and demons and win. She gets these prophecy dreams to warn her, much better than the vision screamers I get!" Kate smiled sympathetically. Cordelia had told her earlier about Doyle's little parting *gift*. At least now Kate knew how Angel always managed to find the weirdest cases to work.

"Anyway, when she gets killed, and they always do cuz bad things happen for them like, nightly, then a new Slayer is called. Poof! One

day a completely normal girl can wake up and bend steel and attract evil."

"Sounds like a terrible thing to have happen to you. How long do they keep this job?" Kate asked, fascinated.

"Well, let's put it this way. Their retirement plan, if they're lucky, includes a nice headstone and a stake through the heart just to be extra careful. Vampires especially enjoy turning Slayers into the undead, kind of a twisted dramatic irony thing."

Kate just shook her head in disbelief. "So, what does this have to do with Buffy?"

"Buffy is the current Slayer."

"No!" Kate threw her napkin down on her plate, shaking her head violently. "No. There is no way that delicate little girl could be this Amazon you're describing."

Cordelia laughed out loud, startling the restaurant patrons around them. "Better not let Buffy hear you describe her like that. She'd kick your butt into the hospital so fast your bones would still be breaking in the emergency room."

Kate just stared at her, eyes rounded. Sobering, Cordelia added, "Buffy has been The Slayer for 4 years. Let's put that into perspective, shall we? In a few more months, she'll officially be the longest-lived Slayer in recorded history. She's beaten Angel, for God's sakes! Think about that one and call her delicate."

Cordelia took pity on Kate. She was definitely in overshare shock. "I'm going to go to freshen up, I'll be back in a few." Getting up, she headed for the ladies' room.

"They're coming to see us."

"We can do nothing for them. The decision was made, the choices must be endured."

"We promised only he would remember."

"We cannot restore his humanity. The situation remains the same."

"It does not. There is another option."

"Curses cannot be undone, Slayer and vampire cannot find happiness together. There will be death and the warrior will be lost to us in the sunlight."

"But souls can be anchored to each other...and Slayers can live forever."

"Will she accept this?"

"The question should be...will he?"

"No! I will not allow this!" Angel flung Buffy's hand away from him and stalked toward the doorway. A flash of light, and he was thrown back to stand in front of Buffy again.

"It is our best and only chance. I don't want to lose you, and this will truly make us soul-mates." Buffy was pleading, frantic at the thought of Angel throwing away the Oracles' offer.

The Oracles stood in silence, watching as the vampire argued for Buffy's life, and Buffy begged her lover for death.

"Enough. The decision must be made. The only question you must answer to each other is whether or not you wish to be together for eternity, fighting with us against the darkness."

"So, they can never be together because of the clause in Angel's curse?" Kate was crying softly into her napkin, stunned by the depth of love Cordelia had described to her. Buffy and Angel shared a love that Kate could only imagine. She didn't know if she ever wanted to love anyone that deeply. To live with a hole in your heart every day of your life, because to do otherwise would doom everyone you loved...

Cordelia nodded solemnly. "Angel left right after Buffy graduated from high school, and other than the Thanksgiving that was but...wasn't, they haven't seen each other again until tonight."

"And now that Buffy has remembered, what will will they do?"

"What can they do? Life will go on, at least until Buffy or Angel dies. Then..." Cordelia stopped and gripped her hands hard around the arms of her chair. "I don't expect one will survive the other for more than a day."

Kate and Cordelia walked slowly up the stairs and into the offices of Angel Investigations. Kate wasn't sure exactly why she had come back with her, perhaps just to see Buffy and Angel again now that she knew their story.

They walked in and stopped short at the sight of Angel and Buffy in a passionate embrace, Buffy curled on Angel's lap with her arms wrapped around his neck as he purred softly into her throat.

"Oh, no." Cordelia sighed and slammed down her purse, then stalked up to them and crossed her arms in front of her. "This is way dangerous, you two. End of the world dangerous, remember?"

"Not anymore, Cordy," came the muffled reply from Buffy as she kissed Angel, then looked up at her. Her eyes gleamed yellow in the dim light, and Cordelia jumped back and scrambled for a stake.

"Run, Kate!" Cordelia cried as she backed away from the couple. "Angel's vamped Buffy, which means both of them are soulless

bloodsuckers now."

She stopped abruptly at Angel's heartfelt sigh. "I warned you she would react this way, but no...you didn't believe me."

Buffy giggled and stood up, her eyes once again those of a normal human. "Don't panic, Cordelia. Yes, Angel vamped me, but no, we're not soulless bloodsuckers." Angel cleared his throat politely, and Buffy hit him playfully. "Okay, okay. The bloodsucker part, yes. But the souls are very much intact, courtesy of the Oracles."

"Huh? What?" Cordelia was incoherent in shock, so Kate figured she'd better step in and take over.

"What Cordelia is trying to say, is...What happened?" Kate kept one hand wrapped around the holy water in her pocket, just for safety's sake. They sounded like themselves, but she had learned that could be deceiving.

"We went to see the Oracles and they offered us a choice. They couldn't lift the curse, or return my humanity. What they did was anchor our souls together."

Cordelia interrupted, a wide smile on her face. "I get it! So Angel turned you, knowing his soul would hold yours until you revived!"

Buffy nodded and glanced at Angel with such a depth of love in her eyes it hurt to see it. "And my soul will anchor his so the clause in the curse won't be able to take hold. The only problem was getting Angel to drain and turn me."

Kate waved her hand weakly, trying to get their attention. "But why did he have to turn you into a vampire? Wouldn't the soul thing work anyway?"

"Yes, it would have...for as long as she lived..." Angel answered with a reproving look at Buffy. She stuck her tongue out at him, and Kate heard something she thought was impossible. Angel...laughed. Apparently, it was new to Cordelia also, she was staring at him in awed amazement.

Angel stopped laughing, but still had a wide, happy smile on his face as he continued. "Buffy insisted we do it now. She wanted to, and I quote, "Retain my full strength and girlish beauty for all time!"

Cordelia nodded in perfect understanding. "Good choice, Buffy." Even Kate had to smile at that vain bit of logic.

"Don't forget we can spend eternity together now, lover," Buffy reminded him coyly. "And, luckily I had a good tan beforehand, so I won't have that whole pale as a ghost thing happening."

"Forgive me if I ask this, but what happens if one of you is killed? Will the other one's soul be lost and the demon take over?" Kate asked, seeing the only hole in the scenario.

Buffy and Angel sobered, touching each other softly before turning to answer Kate. "If one of us dies, the other's soul will remain with

the survivor until they die."

No one responded, knowing that a day would not have a chance to pass before the survivor would rejoin the fallen one.

The mood did not remain somber for long, Buffy and Angel's obvious happiness casting away the momentary pall cast by Kate's question.

Buffy and Kate began talking, getting to know each other, and Cordelia quietly approached Angel. "Are you really okay with this, Angel? I mean, I know how you feel about your undead existence. I didn't think you would ever agree to Buffy joining you..."

Angel smiled, looking surprisingly peaceful. "Buffy and I will have each other always, now. And, since she can't lose her soul, I know she'll never have the blood of innocents on her conscience as I do." He chuckled a little under his breath. "The only thing she says she'll miss is ice cream."

"...and the rest of this semester of college!" Buffy added, as she and Kate walked over to join them. "Night classes for me from now on."

"How is Giles going to take this?" Cordelia asked, worried.

"Believe it or not, he already knew when I called," Buffy giggled. "Apparently, there was this prophecy..."

The End.

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file.